**Sermon Proper 28B**

**Rev. Travis Heide**

**Cypress Lutheran Parish**

**Text:** *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus… let us draw near with a true heart… (Hebrews 10:11-25)*

A week ago in the book of Hebrews, our congregation heard about how Jesus Christ opened for us “the new and living way” (Heb 10:19-21) into heaven through his sacrifice on the cross. Christ offered himself on the cross to atone for all our sins. His death and resurrection occurred once for all time (9:26) on Mount Calvary some two thousand years ago today. We also confess in the Creed that he ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

Yet still today, Christ comes to us through the ministry of the Church on earth – and those of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus enter into a heavenly place of worship every time we gather together. In this wise the author of Hebrews invites us to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (10:22-25) These are the wonders that occur in public worship setting.

We have already acknowledged that our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God – which is to say that he is present everywhere for those who believe in him. We are able to call upon him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks no matter where we happen to be or what our situation. However, those who are able to gather with other believers are more than encouraged to do so. We have this promise from him that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” (Matt 18:20) We need to be supported by our brothers and sisters in Christ in order that our faith may grow rather than stagnate. In order to face our daily vocations confidently, we must be regularly nourished by God’s Word.

Blessed Dr. Martin Luther, in the Smalcald Articles, explains how the Gospel reaches each of us. (Quote.) “We shall now return to the Gospel, which offers counsel and help against sin in more than one way, for God is surpassingly rich in this grace: First, through the spoken word, by which the forgiveness of sin… is preached to the whole world; second, through Baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys; and finally, through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren.” (End quote.) Here we may recognize preaching and the Sacraments which do occur in designated houses of worship like this one. God’s house. But notice here that Luther adds “mutual consolation” between brothers and sisters in Christ; this underscores that no Christian is alone in our struggles against sin, the world, and the adversary. Within the fellowship of the Church, we are able to turn, to any of our fellow believers for comfort from Christ himself. None of us is merely a warm seat in a pew: through holy Baptism, we are called to be a “little Christ” to those who need him (in the words of the Large Catechism).

There are no cavalier Christians. Sadly, I once struggled to teach one parishioner about the need to forgive. “It is between them and God,” she would often repeat. That sentiment is nowhere in God’s Word. We pray in the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”. And we are asked in turn to confess our sins to one another (Jas 5:16). “Bear one another’s burdens,” Paul writes in Galatians chapter six, “and so fulfill the law of Christ.” “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So thin, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Gal 6:2, 10) The fact of the matter is that, when believers isolate from their local congregation and its public worship, they deprive the Christian community a valuable means of support. Everyone has a testimony of Christ’s mercy. The good news is not only the pastor’s to proclaim from the pulpit, but in our conversations, in our prayers for one another, where Christ makes good on his promise to be “there among (us) also.” (Matt 18:20)

The power of this good news gives us confidence, not only each day as we live among our neighbours in this world, but every Lord’s Day as we step into heaven itself. We don’t see the saints and angels gathered around us, but they are certainly present. We do not see heaven open and the Spirit descend each time we relive our Baptism in the confession of sins, but he certainly arrives to do his work in the hearts of our fellow believers. Our hearts are “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). We do not see Jesus in the Sacrament, but he is truly and substantially present under the bread and wine. In these ways the Lord is saying to us again: “I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds… I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” (vv. 16-17) The one, single sacrifice accomplished by Christ Jesus is applied to us again and again in the Divine Service and in mutual Christian fellowship. On each occasion through prayer and thanksgiving, we have the privilege of coming into his heavenly presence. Life in God’s house, the Church, is truly heaven on earth.